

Federal Coaching Frequently Asked Questions:

Q. What is coaching?

A. Coaching is defined as “partnering with coachee(s) in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential (International Coaching Federation).” It is an experiential development process which facilitates change and growth in both individuals and groups. Through structured dialogue, coaches assist their coachees to see new perspectives and achieve greater clarity about their own thoughts, emotions and actions, and about the people and situations around them. The coachee gives power to the relationship, drives the coaching agenda, and is ultimately responsible for the outcome of the coaching engagement. Coaches apply specific techniques and skills, approaches, and methodologies that enable the coachees to develop their goals and design actions to achieve them.

Coaching is one of the most valuable developmental resources we can offer our workforce, and has been linked to positive outcomes such as increased productivity, retention, and engagement. A successful coaching engagement promotes and sustains professional growth and competence. Coaching topics and goals in the Federal setting should be aligned with the employee’s professional goals and organizational mission.

Q. What is the difference between coaching and mentoring?

A. Like mentoring, coaching is considered a developmental activity, which enables individuals to achieve their full potential. While a mentor provides advice, guidance, and subject-matter expertise, a coach uses a process to mutually define actions for professional development without the coach providing any advice. Furthermore, formal coaching is always predicated on a signed agreement between coach and coachee, stating the ethical standards of confidentiality, voluntariness, and self-determination, including the duration of the coaching agreement and the expectations of both parties. It is important to understand the distinctions between these roles to ensure the appropriate use in the workplace.

Q. Who can coach in Federal government?

A. The following individuals are able to “formally” coach:

Professional Coach: an individual who offers support through an ongoing partnership designed to help coachees maximize their potential in their personal and professional lives. Coaches have formal training and are not required to have any specific coaching credentials or certifications.

- **Internal Federal Coach:** a professional coach who is employed within a Federal agency and provides coaching services to other Federal employees across the Government.
- **External Coach:** a professional coach, who is either self-employed or partners with other professional coaches to form a coaching business.

Leaders using coaching skills: a supervisor, manager, or executive who leverages coaching knowledge, approaches, and techniques in working with his or her employees to build awareness and support positive behavior change.

Q. What are some common issues tackled during a coaching engagement?

A. Individuals may engage in coaching for a variety of reasons related to maximizing performance. Examples of potential coaching objectives include the following:

- Develop leadership skills of technical experts interested in supervisory positions
- Facilitate professional transitions (e.g., transition from non-supervisory to supervisory roles, transition into higher level leadership roles)
- Organize and prioritize professional responsibilities
- Clarify vision, create meaningful goals, and develop achievable action steps
- Facilitate change management
- Achieve professional career goals
- Streamline or identify functional efficiencies
- Solve individual leadership challenges
- Excel in self-awareness and self-management
- Identify core strengths and recognize how best to leverage them
- Gain clarity in purpose and decision-making
- Strengthening leadership competencies

Q. How can a Federal employee find a coach?

A. Each agency has a coaching Point of Contact, typically in the Chief Learning Office or Training and Development Office. Employees should work with their Agency POC to find a suitable coach. Since coaching is a learning and development activity, please complete the [SF-182](#) and obtain supervisory approval.

Q. Are coaching sessions confidential?

A. All information discussed during a coaching engagement is confidential unless the coachee gives explicit permission to share or as required by law. A coaching agreement must include a statement of confidentiality that informs coaches of the limits of confidentiality as it relates to Federal employees. Limits of confidentiality in the Federal government include: a report of an act of fraud, waste or abuse; the revelation of having committed a crime; the threat of harm to self or others; the sharing of information in violation of a security clearance; the report of sexual harassment; the requirement by law or a court order to share particular information.

Q. What ethical standards are expected to be followed for coaching in the Federal government?

A. Federal internal coaches are bound to uphold the basic obligation for public service and the standards for ethical conduct for Federal employees found in 5 Code of Federal Regulations Part 2635. These standards supersede any and all coach-specific code of ethics and must be addressed appropriately in the Coaching Agreement, specifically the limits of confidentiality and conflicts of interest.

Q. Can an internal coach act as a coach to anyone in the Federal government?

A. Internal Federal coaches need to avoid situations where they are coaching individuals that could be in their chain of command. Such instances include:

- Engaging in a coaching relationship as an internal coach with a current direct report
- Engaging in a coaching relationship as an internal coach with someone who will imminently become a direct report
- Engaging in a coaching relationship as an internal coach with a current manager in one's supervisory chain
- Engaging in a coaching relationship as an internal coach with a Federal employee and receiving payment outside of regular salary compensation

Using the Point of Contact for the Federal Coaching Database, information listed below, can aid in accessing coaching services across Federal agencies to help minimize the risk of conflicting interests. Supervisory approval is required for all coaching engagements.

Q. What resources currently exist to help me find a coach in Federal government?

A. Federal Coaching Database: An inventory of current internal Federal coaches, whose services may be shared across agencies at no cost. The database is located on OMB's MAX portal and is accessible only to designated points of contact within each agency. Points of contact are responsible for matching coaches from the database with employees who have expressed an interest in receiving coaching. The database was developed in an effort to help Federal agencies enhance their development efforts while minimizing costs and maximizing impact. Each agency has a coaching Point of Contact, typically in the Chief Learning Office or Training and Development Office. Employees should work with their Agency POC to find a suitable coach through the database.

Q. What record-keeping is required for coaching engagements?

A. Coaching in any capacity is considered professional development as long as the goal of the engagement relates to an organization-related outcome. As with any other authorized development activity, time spent in professional coaching, either as an internal Federal coach or coachee, must be approved by the employee's supervisor with consideration for organizational priorities. Agencies should develop a method for documenting coaching hours as part of their program, and should use the [SF-182](#) to document the developmental activity.

Q. What resources currently exist for those interested in becoming coaches in the Federal government?

A. OPM has a variety of resources that provide support, including:

- **Federal Internal Coach Training Program (FICTP)**: Federal employees who want to become a coach might consider using this coach training program. The FICTP is designated by the International Coach Federation (ICF) as Approved Coach Specific Training Hours (ACSTH). Successful graduates of this program can leverage the program to obtain an ICF Credential. Successful graduates may also seek certification through other certifying organizations.
- **Federal Coaching Network Site**: This site is a collaborative interagency space used to promote the sharing of information and services related to coaching. Coaching program managers tasked with planning, development, and implementation of coaching programs can use the Federal Coaching Network site, on Max.gov (an individual account is required to access this site through Max.gov), to find a repository of information to help develop and manage coaching programs. The site includes:
 - Guidelines, samples, and best practices for planners and developers of coaching programs;
 - Documents and plans for implementation of individual Agency coach training programs; and
 - Research and best practices on the ROI of coaching.
- **Coaching in Government Wiki Page**: Federal employees can find information on this site which provides more details on the potential uses and benefits of coaching. Additionally, resources and best practices on coaching in the Federal and private sectors can be found on this site.